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TOWN OF BROOKLINE

Massachusetts

June 1, 2022

John Bain
Chair, Parks and Recreation Commission
Town of Brookline

c/o Alexandra Vecchio
Director of Parks and Open Space
Town of Brookline

Dear Mr. Bain,

This letter outlines the Brookline Preservation Commission's position regarding the future of the skating rink at Larz Anderson Park, and the planning process that was part of the Preliminary Ice Rink Feasibility Study.

The Preservation Commission has reviewed the Feasibility Study and discussed it at two recent meetings on 4/26/2022 and 5/10/2022. Two members of the Preservation Commission (David King, John Spiers) have also met with Wendy Sheridan Ames, a commissioner for Park and Recreation and the Chair of the Skating Rink Task Force; along with Alexandra Vecchio, Director of Parks and Open Space, to discuss the Feasibility Study, and ask questions about the study and plans for Larz Anderson. We have also received a memorandum dated May 5, 2022, from the Parks and Recreation Commission, providing an update on the project.

The Larz Anderson Park is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. The area of the skating rink was designed as an Italianate garden by the Architect and Landscape Painter Charles Platt, who was highly regarded and well published. There is a 1998 Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC) Preservation Restriction that applies to that area and adjacent bowling green. The MHC required the restriction when the Town accepted a

Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund grant to fix the pergola, the steps, and the overlooks on this site. The Preservation Restriction area is directly impacted by changes proposed in the Preliminary Feasibility Study to expand recreational ice skating. Because the Brookline Preservation Commission is recognized as a Certified Local Government by the U.S. Parks Service and MHC under the National Historic Preservation Act, it is responsible for reviewing any changes to the rink at the existing site. Any major changes would require Massachusetts Historical Commission review as well.

The Commission recognizes and appreciates that nearly two years of work has gone into developing a response to the ice-skating rink refrigeration system failure dating back to 2020. We also understand that the Preliminary Feasibility is intended to be a first step in the project and that were it to move forward, the project would require significant collaboration involving all the relevant Town Boards and Commissions.

Nonetheless, we have several reservations about the Preliminary Feasibility Study's recommendations for the skating rinks. The Preservation Commission prefers preservation of the existing site and its historic elements, which would likely include rebuilding the existing facility, rather than creating larger or multiple skating facilities. Contrary to the position of the Skating Ring Task Force, we do not see the failure of the refrigeration equipment as an "opportunity" to dramatically expand recreational skating at Larz Anderson. The existing skating rink has become beloved by generations of Brookline residents and is part of the Town's history. A professionally enclosed rink, or the addition of a second rink would dramatically change the use and feel of the site. We would therefore urge that the existing rink be preserved in its present form.

If there is sustained public interest in expanding recreational ice-skating for the Town, we would recommend a fuller review of other sites. Although the Preliminary Feasibility Report suggests several other sites were "considered," our understanding from additional discussions with Parks and Recreation is that the consultant who completed the feasibility study was asked to only conduct substantial evaluations of Larz Anderson Park and one alternative site: Putterham Woods. But even where not within the boundary of the preservation restriction, a doubling (or more) of the footprint for recreational ice skating would significantly change the use, character, and profile of the park. A more thorough examination of a variety of alternative sites may suggest new possibilities.

As discussion about the future of Larz Anderson Park continues, particularly around a preliminary budgetary proposal for capital improvement plans, we encourage the Park and Recreation Commission to create a robust engagement process that includes a formal mechanism for the Preservation

Commission to participate beyond its statutory responsibilities under the Town's Demolition Bylaw and the Preservation Restriction. Our Commission unfortunately was not invited by any of the parties involved in the Preliminary Feasibility Study to offer formal input into that study.

We would certainly welcome the opportunity to actively participate in shaping the future of Larz Anderson Park, in a way that is sensitive to its history and enduring contributions to our Town.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elton Elperin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elton" and last name "Elperin" clearly distinguishable.

Elton Elperin,
Chair, Brookline Preservation Commission